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INTRODUCTION

In the second half of the 20th century, the Soviet scholar V.M. Illič-Svityč (prematurely dead in 1966) presented a set of studies devoted to demonstrate a genetic relationship among some indigenous linguistic families of northern and central Eurasia, Near East and Northern Africa; the postulated macro-family was called Nostratic, a term created in 1903 by the Danish linguist Holger Pedersen (from the Latin word "nostras", meaning 'our fellow-countryman', plural: "nostrates"). Evidence in favor of Nostratic is based on regular correspondences among proto-languages spread through the aforementioned areas, etymological forms referring to a basic lexicon, and reconstructed grammatical morphemes. The "Nostratic hypothesis" is still controversial; considered highly speculative, is rejected by many specialists, and Nostraticists often disagree with each other; nevertheless, it is also a stimulus for further research into distant relationships among languages.

With this ponderous work (two volumes, xxi, 875 + 976 pages), Allan R. Bomhard presents a detailed study of all the aspects of Proto-Indoeuropean, in comparison with other proto-languages of Northern Eurasia, Middle East, and Indian subcontinent, with the aim of demonstrating that Proto-Indoeuropean is not a genetically isolated language, but must be considered as a part of the Nostratic larger linguistic macrofamily. In the meantime a Nostratic Dictionary has been published by Dolgopolsky (2008, online version), but perhaps in Bomhard's work for the first time the Nostratic question, as well its "status artis", is globally examined and presented in all its features: phonology, morphology, syntax, putative homeland, ending with a semantic index and a comparative vocabulary, which could be considered the summa of pluridecennial studies of Allan Bomhard, as he remembers in his Preface.

SUMMARY

The book, in two volumes, is divided into three main parts: Part 1: Introduction, comparative phonology, homelands, etc.; Part 2: Comparative morphology; Part 3: Comparative vocabulary.

The first part (pp. 1-271), divided into 15 sections, begins with an introduction of methodological character (1. Introduction, history of research, and methodology), to which follow: 2. A survey of Nostratic languages; 3. A

brief history of the reconstruction of the Proto-Indo-European phonological system; 4. The reconstruction of the Proto-Indo-European phonological system; 5. An outline of the development of the PIE stop system in the Indo-European daughter languages; 6. A sketch of Proto-Kartvelian phonology; 7. A sketch of Proto-Afrasian phonology; 8. A sketch of Proto-Uralic phonology; 9. A sketch of Proto-Draavidian phonology; 10. A sketch of Proto-Altaic phonology; 11. Eskimo-Aleut, Chukchi-Kamchatkan, and Gilyak; 12. A sketch of Proto-Nostratic phonology; 13. The Nostratic homeland and the dispersal of the Nostratic languages; 14. The origin of Etruscan; 15. Sumerian and Nostratic.

The second part (pp. 273-529), includes four sections: 16. Nostratic morphology I: the evidence; 17. Nostratic morphology II: reconstructions; 18. Proto-Indo-European morphology I: traditional reconstruction; 19. Proto-Indo-European morphology II: prehistoric development. The section References (pp. 531-756) constitutes a comprehensive bibliographic repertory up to 2007-2008 of the studies in the field.

The first volume ends with the Index verborum. English-Nostratic index to volume 2 (pp. 757-875), an essential tool for research, which allows readers to find Proto-Nostratic roots beginning from a concept in English, a "semantic" index which increases a previous, partial and tentative one by M. Kaiser, based on Illiè-Svityè reconstructions (Kaiser 1990).

The third part is the entire second volume: Comparative vocabulary of the Nostratic languages (pp. 1-925), containing 857 lemmata, followed by an Appendix: Language contact (pp. 926-976).

EVALUATION

At the beginning, the Author explains the methodological principles used in distant linguistic comparison (pp. 8-22), which is based on comparative method. Bomhard's approach to language comparison in order to try to establish genetic relationship among the various Nostratic languages and to reconstruct Proto-Nostratic roots, is derived both from the method adopted by J.H. Greenberg, who works with "mass comparison", and from traditional methods of internal reconstruction and comparison.

According to Bomhard, the language families which can be included in the Nostratic macro-family are: Indo-European, Uralic-Yukaghir, Altaic, Chukchi-Kamchatkan, Gilyak, Eskimo-Aleutin, Etruscan language (all included in the putative "Eurasian"), Kartvelian, Afrasian, and Elamo-Draavidian. The Author does not consider Sumerian as a daughter Nostratic language, but only as an idiom distantly connected with Nostratic, rejecting his own previous opinions about a special relationship of Sumerian to Elamo-Draavidian (p. 264); in chapter 15. he briefly analyzes some morphological and phonological features of Sumerian, trying to show that this language is surely "distantly related to Nostratic", on the basis, for instance, of possessive suffixes and pronominal prefixes, which seem to show parallels in some Nostratic proto-languages (Proto-Uralic, Proto-Tungus), and common Nostratic too (personal pronouns). Therefore, as in previous works (see: Bomhard & Kerns 1994), Sumerian parallels are presented at the end of relevant items, outside the rigorously structured pattern of lemmata. In comparison to the Illiè-Svityè Nostratic macrofamily,

which did not include Chukchi-Kamchatkan, Eskimo-Aleutin (later added by Dolgopolsky), Yukaghir, Gilyak (both included by Greenberg in the Eurasian language family, which Bomhard includes in Nostratic; Greenberg 2000-2002), Bomhard's Nostratic macrofamily shows an evolution, with the inclusion of the poorly attested Etruscan, whose origin is described in chapter 14., as a language related to Nostratic, forming, with Lemnian and Raetic, the Tyrrhenian language family, whose mother language, Proto-Tyrrhenian, at present, unlike Indo-European, has yet to be properly reconstructed: and this is the reason for which Etruscan appears as an independent language, inside the related items of the comparative vocabulary, in comparison to linguistic families related to Nostratic. Sumerian and Etruscan are still now being considered "isolated languages", without any known genetic connection (Gell-Mann, Peros & Starostin 2009), therefore their inclusion in a comparative Nostratic vocabulary could support researchers looking for new hypothesis about their origin, with the great amount of linguistic and bibliographical data contained in lemmata; it is perhaps the first time that languages for which no proto-language has up to now been reconstructed are used as term of comparison for Proto-Nostratic reconstructions. Also for the first time, a great amount of material has been included in the comparative vocabulary from Eskimo-Aleut and Chukchi-Kamchatkan; and we must remember that, as Bomhard underlines, a Proto-Eskimo-Aleut mother language has not yet been reconstructed till now, while, according to Fortescue, Jakobson & Kaplan (1994), a Proto-Eskimo phonological system can be posited (p. 209).

The book has a great potential for being a necessary complement to major books on Indo-European, comparative phonology, comparative morphology, long-range linguistic comparison. It is not only of interest to advanced students and scholars of the different linguistic families and related daughter languages concerned with Nostratic, who are interested in a critical exposition of the history of the development of Indo-European and comparative linguistic studies, but it also is an indispensable reference tool, providing a useful repertoire of the main previous studies in the aforementioned linguistic families (especially Indo-European), reference materials, bibliography (which could have been a little slimmer if the Author had not translated into English every item in any language different from English).

Of particular importance are the relatively concise "sketches" of the linguistic families (pp. 141-216) which, in the Author's view, along with Indo-European form the Nostratic macro-family. In the form of detailed summaries, the Author presents an updated critical "overview" of the phonological systems (with unavoidable and desirable expansion in the field of morphology) of Proto-Kartvelian, Proto-Afrasian, Proto-Uralic, Proto-Dravidian, Proto-Altaic, and Eskimo-Aleut, Chukchi-Kamchatkan, Gilyak; at the end of every chapter, appears a summary table of phonological correspondences between proto-language and daughter languages, recapitulating the chapter's content. A comparative table of sound correspondences posited among Proto-Nostratic and related proto-languages is given on pp. 217-220.

The author's dedication to Indo-European has an overwhelming preeminence, compared to the space devoted to the other proto-languages; Allan Bomhard is an Indoeuropeanist, and one can only hope specialists in other linguistic families

will further his work in the reconstruction of phonological and morphological proto-languages systems, trying to investigate further possibilities that they are genetically related, or may belong to the Nostratic macro-family.

To the hypothetic reconstruction of the phonological system of Proto-Nostratic, Bomhard devotes a great part of the book (pp. 45-220). Here, we can only summarize that in this, as in his previous works, Bomhard radically revises the system of Nostratic phonemic correspondences in the light of the Glottalic Theory of Proto-Indo-European consonants proposed by Th.V. Gamkrelidze and V.V. Ivanov (pp. 54-60); he also discusses (pp. 61-69) the Proto-Indo-European laryngeals, about which opinions differ among specialists, especially about the exact number and phonetic make-up of the laryngeals (see: Winter 1965), trying to determine their probable phonetic value, with the aid of Afroasiatic evidence: similar phonemes are known in Accadian and Arabic, and many of the developments posited by Bomhard for these Proto-Indo-European phonemes "are similar to developments found in Coptic" (p. 69). In such a slippery field, comparison with other Nostratic proto-languages and daughter languages can help to handle a question that could not be successfully faced either on the basis of Indo-European data alone, or positing a multitude of controversial phonemes (as for instance in Dolgopolsky 2008), instead of the three or four laryngeals posited by the large majority of linguists for Proto-Indo-European.

About the original Nostratic homeland, the Author - in this going along with Colin Renfrew - seems to agree with the earlier conclusions of Illič-Svityč and Dolgopolsky in postulating a Nostratic "Urheimat" within the Mesolithic (or Epi-paleolithic) Middle East, the stage which directly preceded the Neolithic and was transitional to it. For Bomhard, the unified Nostratic parent language may be dated to between 15000 to 12000 BCE, a period which corresponds to the end of the last Ice Age; and can be located in the "Fertile Crescent" (a region incorporating the Levant and Mesopotamia, corresponding to present-day Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine - in its broader meaning, the geographical term referring to an area that includes contemporary Israel and the Palestinian territories - Kuwait, Jordan, south-eastern Turkey, and south-western Iran), just south of the Caucasus. Beginning around 12000 BCE, Nostratic began to spread; by 10000 BCE distinct dialect groups appeared. The first to distinguish among Nostratic macro-family was Afrasian; roughly around 9000 BCE, Eurasian spread from the Fertile Crescent to the northeast; at about 8000 BCE another dialect group, Elamo-Dravidian, began to develop.

The Nostratic hypothesis suffers from a scarcity of evidence from a morphological point of view, the most part of studies being devoted to phonology, and this part of Bomhard's work tries to supply to this deficiency in the first two sections, the former pointing to the presentation of morphological marks shared by various Nostratic family languages (pp. 273-386), the latter (pp. 387-415) attempting a systematic reconstruction of a putative Proto-Nostratic morphology on the basis of that evidence. The last two sections of this part are devoted to Indo-European morphology; from an exhaustive presentation of the traditional views, up to the pre-historic development, on the basis of the chronologization - four main periods: Pre-Proto-Indo-European; Phonemic Stress Stage of Proto-Indo-European; Phonemic Pitch Stage of Proto-Indo-European; Disintegrating Proto-Indo-European, described on pp.

101-108 - proposed by the Author for the phonological system; as a result, a new approach to what the Indo-European morphological system could have been like at the beginning stage of its maturation process.

The analysis has relied "almost exclusively on Indo-European data with only passing reference to what is found in cognate Nostratic languages" (p. 519). The Author recognizes that "the picture that emerges is rather stark and rather unrealistic." However, comparison of Indo-European morphology with other Nostratic languages morphology tries to show that "a whole series of relational markers can be reconstructed for Proto-Nostratic, and at least some of these must have been inherited by Proto-Indo-European" (ivi). But the question suffers from a lack of reconstructions from non Indo-European Nostratic proto-languages, which at present are not even of the same level of reconstruction of Indo-European, surely the most studied proto-language of the last 250 years.

The first part (pp. 273-386), presents morphological evidence for Nostratic, including Eurasian data with Illiè-Svityè's, Dolgopol'sky's, and properly Bomhard's latest intuitions about other branches of Nostratic. According to Bomhard, Nostratic morphology made a breakthrough with the publication of the first volume of J.H. Greenberg's "Indo-European and its closest relatives" (Greenberg 2000-2002), which included a great amount of morphemic correspondences among Eurasian languages. Where Greenberg did not reconstruct the Eurasian vowels (for instance, for the pronoun stems) Bomhard attempts to compensate on the basis of the evidence of both Eurasian and other Nostratic languages. The great part of the reconstructions that appear in this full-bodied chapter, and which form the most part of it, are nearly the same which are lemmatized in the Comparative vocabulary, sometimes with integrations; *repetita juvant*, but maybe, if the Author had unified all these more than hundred-pages of descriptions in the Vocabulary, commenting them in this chapter devoted to the evidence, the book could have been more readable.

The following chapter, focused on the systematic Nostratic morphology reconstruction, is much shorter than the former (pp. 387-415); the Author, on the basis of evidence for Nostratic morphology, proposes that Proto-Nostratic was an active language, recognizing that "the assumption that we make about the morphological and syntactical structure of a given proto-language profoundly affects the reconstruction that we propose.... Therefore, it follows that the reconstruction I posit will conform with an active structure" (p. 387).

Reconstructions are not to be driven by theory alone, but supported by data, and must be consistent from a typological perspective; many Authors have presented convincing arguments about an early phase of Proto-Indo-European as an active language, as Proto-Afrasian (p. 388), enhancing the possibilities of attempting a reconstruction of Proto-Nostratic as an active language itself. In the following two chapters, devoted to Proto-Indo-European morphology (Traditional reconstruction, pp. 417-483, and Prehistoric development, pp. 485-529), the Author tries to summarize morphological evidence pointing to underline that Proto-Indo-European is to be classified as a member of the Eurasian branch of Nostratic, a branch which could develop distinctive characteristics due to socio-cultural interactions with Caucasian, especially with Northwest languages (p. 529).

The Comparative Vocabulary contains 857 entries, divided into 42 sections, each represented by the word-initial Proto-Nostratic phoneme; every section begins with a table of correspondence between the Proto-Nostratic word-initial phoneme and its reflex in the daughter branches. Every Proto-Nostratic root is given with a translation, followed by corresponding form for the proto-language, if reconstructed, and by the forms in the various daughter languages; not all known cognates are cited, in order to give only a representative sampling illustrating the semantics involved. The Author, for the reconstructed forms for each proto-language, uses a uniform method of transcription; Proto-Indo-European roots are given in accordance with the reinterpretation of the Proto-Indo-European phonological system by Gamkrelidze-Ivanov. I hope that in the near future a third volume, containing all the forms of proto- and attested languages cited in the previous two, with reference to the corresponding Proto-Nostratic root, will appear, giving scholars the possibility to operate a fast and prompt cross-data retrieval, and a differently oriented information scanning of the invaluable lexical heritage contained in this Comparative vocabulary. The Author tries here "to eliminate the arbitrary nature of much of the previous work, as well as some current work" (p. 5); Dolgopolsky's Nostratic Dictionary (Dolgopolsky 2008), with its 3033 entries, has been one of the sources of Bomhard's Vocabulary, even if most part of Dolgopolsky's etymologies have been rejected, due to Bomhard's approach, which is "positivistic, that is, data-oriented, rather than impressionistic".

This book represents an invaluable resource for Indo-europeanists, comparatists, and specialists in all the linguistic families and languages that, in Bomhard's and, most generally, in Nostraticists' vision, compose the linguistic mosaic of Euro-and Afrasia. Its intended audience is probably specialists, but in my view, some parts of the first volume could also be appreciated by readers with no specific linguistic background. Bomhard's work is essential for the development of this field of studies, and gives an immense contribution to development and implementation of the reconstruction of a putative prehistoric proto-language which gave origin to several today's language families.

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